

My Priorities



To meet our state's many competing needs, the governor has proposed some sharp cuts, particularly in human services, for the coming biennium. I will work hard to ensure that we are careful to avoid cutting necessary programs that help children, seniors, and the disabled.

My priorities are:

- Building an outstanding and safe learning environment in our schools
- Protecting the region's natural environment
- Increasing access to health care
- Improving our transportation system so that we can spend less time in our cars and more time as we choose
- Ensuring that a safety net exists for those left behind by our region's economy

These are my priorities. Please feel free to contact me with your thoughts and concerns regarding these issues, the budget and other areas of legislation.

Keeping in Touch

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Representative

Ed Murray

43rd District

PO Box 40600
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2001 Budget Report



Representative

Ed Murray

43rd District

2001 Budget Report

Dear citizens of the 43rd District,

Crafting a budget is one of the most important things we do in Olympia. Every two years we write a budget that charts the course our state will take for the coming two years and beyond. The decisions we make shape the quality of our public schools, impact the efficiency of our transportation system, affect the health of our fellow citizens, and influence the condition of our natural environment.

This year we face tremendous challenges as we head into budget negotiations. With health care costs rising by \$1 billion, two voter-approved education initiatives costing another estimated \$684 million, the recent passage of I-695, an energy shortage, a drought and a Capitol-shaking earthquake, we will have to make many tough choices. Additionally, the governor has vowed to keep the legislature in session until we pass a long-term transportation plan.

If you have any ideas or want to find out more about the 2001 legislative session, feel free to contact my office. I welcome suggestions on how to better serve the citizens of the 43rd District.

Sincerely,

Rep. Ed Murray
43rd District



How we got here

Falling revenues

Tax cuts for business

Responding to an anti-tax climate that first manifested itself with the passage of Initiative 601 in 1993, the legislature took several major steps to reduce taxes starting during the 1994 legislative session. Unfortunately, these tax reductions, largely benefiting big businesses, have had an especially deep impact on recent budgets.

Since 1995, tax reductions passed by the legislature have cost the state \$2.4 billion in revenues.

Initiative 695

I-695, though found unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court, regrettably was passed by the legislature last year in the form of a major reduction in the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET). This reduction took over \$1.2 billion away from our transportation system, hitting local bus service, such as Metro, especially hard.

The initiative also slashed more than \$230 million in funds that the state distributes to cities and counties for criminal justice and other important local government expenditures.

Other Key Budget Areas

Transportation

Since 1980 the population of our state has grown by 41 percent while the amount of miles driven daily has risen 78 percent. All of us have felt the impacts of this- whether arriving late for work or missing an appointment or showing up late for dinner. Our transportation mess must be addressed immediately. Consequently, this year we are charged with developing a statewide transportation plan that guides us well into the future.

As a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation, I worked closely with leaders from the environmental, labor, and business communities. We examined our state's traffic problems as well as future population and housing growth trends and crafted a series of recommendations to improve our transportation system. Among our many recommendations were two key proposals- 1) dedicating one-third of new revenue to transportation choices such as bus, rail transit, promoting carpools, and fostering development around transit centers, and 2) creating a flexible revenue source to fund portions of the transportation system not covered by the gas tax. These two measures would dramatically increase our flexibility in addressing traffic problems and give local communities more autonomy in addressing regional transportation needs.

Ultimately, the voters will decide what kind of an investment we will make in our transportation infrastructure, but the recommendations of the commission serve as a strong foundation.



Capital Budget

The House Capital Budget Committee oversees the construction and development of buildings for higher education, public schools, prisons, as well as dedicating funds to build low-income and affordable housing, parks, preserving open space, and restoring salmon habitat.

As co-chair of this committee, I am working with my fellow committee members to address the many important needs of this state. Though this will be one of the smaller capital budgets in years, I remain committed to:

- Restoring cuts to the Housing Trust Fund.
- Protecting and preserving recreation and conservation lands through the Washington Wildlife Recreation Program such as South Lake Union Park.
- Guaranteeing funding to enable the Trust Land Transfer Program to set aside state trust lands as natural areas or parks.
- Providing adequate resources to promote salmon recovery efforts.
- Repairing and renovating community and technical college facilities including the Urban Technology Center at Seattle Central Community College.
- Continuing to provide funding for Arts/Heritage/Community Service projects like the Empty Space Theatre, the Town Hall Community Cultural Center, restoration of the Good Shepherd Center and the Dearborn House.



Rising Costs

Education Initiatives

The two education spending initiatives that passed overwhelmingly last fall show our state's strong support for teachers and our commitment to building an excellent educational system in Washington.

These measures, reducing class sizes and raising teacher pay, are important steps towards improving our education system. Still, paying for them will be costly. The initiatives did not establish a new funding mechanism, instead setting aside approximately \$684 million in new spending from existing state funds.



Health Care

Spending on medical care for children and people with disabilities along with state employees, such as Washington State Patrol officers and schoolteachers, is projected to grow by \$1.2 billion in the next biennium, an increase of more than one-third over the current budget.

This growth is attributable partly to the high cost of prescription drugs and increased state efforts to provide health coverage to low-income families and seniors. Despite our state efforts, between 600,000 and 700,000 Washington residents still lack any health care coverage.

Other Rising Costs

Increased costs to retain workers who directly serve the elderly, disabled and foster care children, salary increases for state and higher education employees, higher overall school costs, and costly lawsuits against the state are some of the other major forces acting on our budget.

To retain the many valuable individuals who serve some of our state's most needy residents, the state is considering whether to increase its allocation for these importance service workers at an estimated cost of \$107 million for the coming biennium.

Current budget framework

So that's what we're faced with this session.

To summarize with the specifics, the state budget for the upcoming 2001-2003 biennium presents — to put it mildly — an unprecedented set of challenges. According to the March forecast, state revenue is estimated to be \$22.3 billion in the next 24-month budget period (July 1, 2001, through June 30, 2003). However, it's estimated that we'll need \$22.5 billion in the new budget to maintain our *present* level of programs and services alone. (The state budget for the current, 1999-2001 biennium, is \$20.85 billion.)

Unfortunately, our budget problems are not as simple as lifting the I-601 lid. The problem is that we have a major shortfall of revenue. This puts us in the unpleasant position of trying to raise revenue, cut spending or do some of both.